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ABSTRACT

Parents of all children in a university home economics department preschool (N=18), a university day care center (N=40), and a Montessori Method preschool (N=36) were contacted to determine if they allowed their preschool children differing amounts of freedom to discuss body self-concepts according to sex of the child or type of preschool the child attended. Parents more frequently refused to allow daughters than sons to participate in a body self-concept interview. Parents from the university home economics department preschool had a higher refusal rate than parents from either of the other preschools. (Author)

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THE DIFFERING AMOUNTS OF FREEDOM PARENTS ALLOW THEIR PRESCHOOL SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO DISCUSS BODY SELF-CONCEPT

by

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Introduction

Despite the forces merging sex roles of adult men and women and the increased legislation mandating non-discrimination on the basis of sex, there are no controls on the sex role socialization of preschool children by their parents. Behavioral reinforcement by parents of sex role differences has been shown to exist from the time of birth (Weitzman, 1975). Even before birth, differing expectations were found evidenced by mothers who were more likely to interpret an active, kicking, and moving fetus to be a boy than a girl (Lewis, 1972). Garai (1968) concluded that while male infants slept less and were more active, female infants were actually more sturdy, mature, and healthy. Regardless of these actual physical differences between male and female infants, research results agree that parents play more roughly and vigorously with male infants and are more protective of female infants (Block, 1977; Howe, 1971; Rubin, Provenzano, and Luria, 1974; Seavey, Katz, and

Zalk, 1975; Yarrow, Rubenstein, and Pedersen, 1971). Two studies, one done with infants (Rubenstein, 1967) and one with two year olds (Minton, Kagan, and Levine, 1971) found that mothers attend to male babies more than to female babies and that such maternal attentiveness facilitates exploratory behavior.

By the time children are preschool age, studies have found that parents encourage traditional sex role appropriate behaviors (Atkinson and Endsley, 1976) with mothers fostering more autonomy and independence in boys than in girls (Domash and Balter, 1976; Callard, 1964; Hoffman 1972; Saegert and Hart, 1976). Frazier and Sadker (1973) reported girls were treated more protectively and were subjected to more restrictions and controls than were boys.

Joffe (1971) concluded that preschools may alsc play an important role in sex role socialization. While sex role stereotyping has been identified in many school books, tests, and curriculum guides (Saario, Jacklin, and Tittle, 1973), early childhood nonsexist educational programs and materials are available (Women's

Action Alliance, 1973). However, research results have shown that even when teachers believe there is equality between boys and girls in the classroom, stereotyping existed in teachers' expectations and attitudes and was transmitted to students in nonverbal as well as verbal ways (Chasen, 1974; Sadker and Sadker, 1974). Therefore, the exact roles preschools as well as parents, play in sex role socialization need to be researched further.

Statement of Problem

This study explored the differing amounts of freedom parents in a midwest university community allowed their preschool sons and daughters to discuss body self-concept and examined these differences in relationship to the type of preschool their child attended. The hypotheses tested were:

1. Parents of preschool children will refuse more frequently to allow daughters than sons to participate in a body self-concept study.
2. Parents of children in a university

home economics department preschool, a university day care center, and a private Montessori Method preschool will have differences in rates of refusal to allow children to participate in a body self-concept study.

Method

The sample (N=89) consisted of parents of all children in the University of Northern Iowa Home Economics Department Preschool (N=18), the University of Northern Iowa Day Care Center (N=40), and the Montessori System Preschool of Blackhawk County, Iowa (N=36) during one spring semester. Each preschool enrollment had equal numbers of boys and girls. Using analysis of variance, there were no differences between parents of boys and of girls or among parents of children at the three preschools on the variables of age and of educational level of head of household. There were no differences between boys and girls or among children at the three preschools on age, birthorder, or number of siblings.

A letter was sent to all parents in the sample stating the researcher would like each child in their preschool to participate in a five to ten minute individual interview on body self-concept and stating the interview would consist of asking the child to name body parts on a drawing of a nude child, say what they like most about their body, and say what they like least about their body. If parents had objections to their child participating in the study, they had to call the researcher within a week to exempt their child from the interview.

Results and Discussion

In the university home economics department preschool, parents of all nine girls refused participation while parents of only one of the nine boys refused participation. Parents of nine of twenty girls and two of twenty boys in the university day care center refused participation. The two day care center boys not allowed to participate also had sisters who were not allowed to participate. Three day care center girls who were not allowed to participate

had brothers who were allowed to participate. In the Montessori Method preschool, parents of eight of eighteen girls and one of eighteen boys refused participation.

Analysis of the data by Chi Square tests yielded results which supported hypothesis one at the $p < .001$ level overall and for each preschool individually. Hypothesis two was supported overall at the $p < .056$ level. However, the difference between rate of refusal at the university home economics department preschool and the university day care center and between the university home economics department preschool and the Montessori Method preschool were each significant at the $p < .01$ level, with university home economics department preschool parents having a higher rate of refusal. There were no differences between refusal rates at the university day care center and the Montessori Method preschool.

The results of this study indicated that parents were more protective of preschool age daughters than of preschool age sons in regard to viewing nude drawings of children and dis-

cussing body self-concepts. This parental protectiveness may be a major factor in explaining why preschool age girls have been found to have lower body self-concepts than preschool age boys (Story, 1977).

The university home economics department preschool had a higher refusal rate than either of the other two preschools. This could indicate that the home economics preschool attracks parents who are more protective of daughters than of sons and/or that it reinforces such sex role stereotypes in its program. More research is needed to further clarify the reasons for variations in refusal rates found in this study between the different types of preschools.

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